



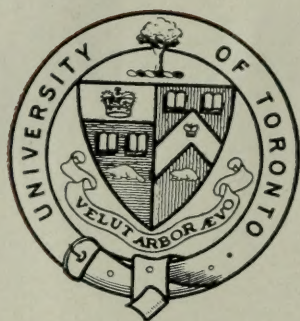
Italy's Right
to her Natural Boundaries

(with a map)



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*God, with the immortal
writing of mountains and waters,
has traced mother countries.*

ALEARDI

ITALY'S RIGHT TO HER NATURAL BOUNDARIES

I.

THE ROMAN CONCEPTION OF THE BOUNDARY OF ITALY.

Since when — parallelly and contemporaneously to the political and military expansion of republic Rome — the designation « ITALY » became extended, from the peninsula part to the entire geographic Italian region, it at once appeared to the practical minds of the Romans that *the logic natural boundary of this region was to be the complete circle of the Alps.*

The bitter experience of the Carthaginian invasion, led by Hannibal, the threatening raid of the Cimbri and Teutons, overcome only by the strategical genius of Marius, induced the Romans to fix their attention on the Alpine bulwark which alone could hinder the plains of the River Po from becoming the natural battle field of the invaders breaking in from the north and from the east.

With the constitution of the Empire, the Alpine circle appeared always more clearly to the Romans as being the natural barrier against the threats of the barbarians. In the historical and political writings of the late republic and empire times numerous references to this geographic and military function of the Alps are to be found. Without calling to mind the lesser writers, mention of the above is made by Polibius, and later on by Titus Livius, Velleius Paterculus, Anneus Flavius and also Diogenes of Alicarnassus besides Pomponius Mela of Rheims.

Although there is wanting, in the expressions of these writers, a precise indication of a «geographic or political-administrative boundry», and although their knowledge of the alpine system could be only slight, they

already considered the « Infames frigoribus Alpes », as Titus Livius called them, a real natural limit.

And, though the Alpine region presented but slight interest to the Romans, the importance of the great alpine vallies as ways of communication and invasion certainly did not escape them. So much so, that under Augustus they carried out the occupation of the Trentino, which became a colony of the Empire, and in a very short time, Trent, on the highway of Lamagna, assumed great importance.

In the 3rd Century, when the Empire was reorganized administratively on firm foundations in order to oppose the Germanic danger which was becoming more apparent, full of disastrous consequences for the structure of the Roman Empire, *the political and military boundaries of Italy were progressively extended, even to the external slopes of the Alps.*

With the arrangements made in the times of Diocletianus and of Constantinus, when the Germanic danger more closely threatened Latin civilization, the occupation was extended to the Vindelicia and the Rezia, thus enclosing within the boundaries the greatest part of the Alpine region.

Analogously, the eastern parte of the Illiricus (Carniola) was united by firm administrative and political bounds to Italy, as being part of the government of Upper Italy; Aemona (Laibach) and Nauporto (Ober-Lai-bach) were also considered in Italian territory.

Istria — conquered by Rome two centuries before the birth of Christ — was always closely connected with Italy, being considered as an integrating part of Venetia, and Roman civilization reached such a high point there as to leave indelible traces in the beauty of the monuments which can still be admired in the coastal cities (Triest, Pola, Parenzo), in the juridic institutions of private rights, and in the popular traditions jealously preserved by the peoples there in spite of the brutal and violent invasions of the Germans, Slavs and Hungarians.

Though the Roman Empire collapsed as a political and military organism, the treasure of its culture was always maintained by these peoples of Italic conscience. Through every vicissitude, notwithstanding Barbaric domination, the Roman tradition was maintained vigorous and alive and from it, even in the dark ages, manifestations of Roman Italian sentiments sprung forth.

Nor did the constitution of Roman-Barbaric kingdoms, appearing as new branches on the great felled trunk of the Roman Empire, succeed in destroying what there was of eternal in the civilization of Rome, for both the « Regnum Longobardorum » and the « Regno Italiae » created by the Carlovingians, carrying out the traditions of Imperial Rome, included within their boundaries the Dukedom of Trent and also Venetia and Istria, not only for defensive reasons, but also because the Barbarians themselves

felt that these provinces, for the common character of the language, the institutions and the traditions, formed, with the remainder of Roman Italy, an inseparable and insoluble whole.

With reference to this, we may remember the act of the Longobard king, Alboino, who, looking towards the Italian region from Mount Re (Mt. Nanos), fixed the boundaries of the new kingdom of Italy there.

II.

THE EASTERN DEFENCE OF ITALY ACCORDING TO THE IDEAS OF ROME

Should these historic precedents, in the valuation of a military and political problem, seem to some to have but relative value, a direct interest instead will be presented by the example of the *military criteria* which inspired Rome for defence of the threatened eastern entrance to Italy.

The thought of fortifying the eastern boundary of Italy, to defend it from the threat of the barbaric trans-Alpine peoples, came to the Romans as soon as Istria was conquered.

The defences built by them aimed essentially at closing up the traditional roads of communication and invasion of Nauporto, Postojna and of the Liburnica coast.

In the first period (even in the year 128 B. C.) it seems that a line of entrenchments was built from Quarnero to Longatico (Loitsch), along the external arch of the Carso heights in which the gap of Nauporto, the road of the defiles of Clana, and the coastal road, were the only accesses then practicable.

The « Limes » meanwhile included not only the Adelsberg basin, but also the Ober-Laibach and Zirknitz basins.

In a second period, perhaps about in the second century after Christ, an internal «vallum» appeared which from the basin of Aidussina probably reached the strong-point of Mt. Catalano, which seems to have been reinforced by a « castrum ». This internal « limes », though militarily it had the advantage of being shorter, less winding and nearer to the supply dépôts, had on the contrary to defend a larger number of ways of access.

The barrier defences were prepared with particular care, especially those along the most dangerous and well known way of invasion, which from the gap of Nauporto led to the basin of Aidussina. In front of the eastern ridge of the Piro Woods and of the highest point of elevation (Hill 882) two «valli» were built, the one in the rear being reinforced by a

«castle» dominating both slopes. Another solid «castle» dominated the basin of Aidussina.

It seems that the coastal road was guarded by two «castles»: one overlooking Fiume, the other on the height of Castua.

The «valli» in the accompanying map are marked according to the reconstruction made by scholars. It seems however that its trace was discontinued, according to the greater or lesser difficulties of access apposed internal «vallum» and of the two «valli» of the Piro Woods, remains of unanimously and concordantly through the medieval and modern periods by the ground in front. The «valli» marked indicate, not so much continued entrenchments, as the line on which the Romans considered it necessary to base the eastern defence of Italy.

Of the «valli» and castles shown, scholars have frequently found traces (excavations and reconnaissance have ascertained: portions of the internal «vallum» and of the two «valli» of the Piro Woods, remains of a defensive wall to the north west of Fiume, ruins of the «castri» in the neighbourhood of «ad Prium», Aidussina, Fiume): in the local folk lore also they are still remembered (1).

At any rate, whatever opinion one may have on the existence of this complete fortified military system, the fundamental fact results certain that **the Romans themselves recognized the military necessity of placing the eastern defence of Italy on the external arches of the Julian Alps.**

III.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE BOUNDARIES OF ITALY

If the Roman tradition is a splendid proof of the vital necessity of validly closing up that eastern entrance to Italy which from the most remote times had been barred against the danger of invasions, it is not work done in vain to remember how the conception — that the boundary of Italy must be the circle of the Alps, from the Brenner to the Quarnero — passed unanimously and concordantly through the medieval and modern periods to reach us adorned by the thoughts of poets, enriched by historic testimony and strengthened by the opinions of statesmen and scientists.

(1) The information referred to is taken from the well known studies of *P. Kandler's* Istrian Diplomatic Code, Trieste, Lloyd, 1864, *G. Sacchi*, Ancient boundaries of Italy.

Reports of the Lombard Literature and Science Institute 1864.

A. Müllner and *A. Puschi*, Archeografo Triestino, 1902.

The testimony of poets and men of letters, considered in itself and for itself, in a political problem, cannot assume the value of an absolute and irrefragable testimony, but it constitutes the surest and most eloquent index of the currents of thought and the convictions of their ages (1).

Not only *Dante*, who fixed admirably the boundaries of Italy on the north, east and west, but ancient poets and medieval chronicle writers clearly say that our Peninsula is defended by the arch of the Alps.

Petrarca and Fazio degli Uberti in the XIV Century; Cammelli, called Pistoia, and Galezzo di Tarsia in the XV and early XVI centuries lament that the Alps are not a sufficient defence for Italy against the greed of the new barbarians: « Insecure barrier to your beloved shores » sings Galeazzo di Tarsia.

And so also in the successive centuries up to Pindemonte who calls the Brenner the extreme boundary of Italy towards Germany: « The heights of the Brenner arise between you and Italy ».

« A right sanctioned by God and by nature » is the expression running through the Italian poets even also when, in the XVII and XVIII centuries, the conscience of nationality seems to have grown feeble.

But, as already said, the poets only manifest a vital and deep current of thought, of which we find pure and clear expression in all the series of historians and statesmen. The idea appears limpid even in most obscure, and often anonymous medieval chronicle writers. Through numberless vicissitudes and historical crises, the Roman tradition never perishes and in all geographic descriptions, often in the midst of the dark ages, the tradition of the Roman boundaries are maintained unaltered. « Venetiae et Histriae pro una provincia habentur » (Venice and Istria are one province) writes the Longobard historian Paolo Diacono, and he gives great importance to the eastern boundary as a defence against the aggressiveness of the Avari and Slavs.

Istria was always considered by all medieval chronicle writers to be Italian; not the slightest doubt was admitted on this point.

Flavio Biondo da Forlì, a humanist of great fame, and Guicciardini, the historian, considered Nauporto (now Ober-Laibach) as belonging to the Italian region.

When cartography arose as an art in itself, the cartographic representation of the boundaries of Italy corresponded to the ancient and classic tradition both Roman and Italian. Italy is therein enclosed in the crown

(1) What a prophetic accent resounds in the limpid verses of Petrarca:

« Nature provided well for our state when she placed the Alps as a defence between us and German ire ».

of the Trentino, Carnia and Julian Alps which separate her from Germany, Carniola, Croazia (or Pannonia). In a word, the boundary falls on the edge of the basin of Lubiana, generally including the region of Postojna (Adelsberg).

But it was really the reawakening of a national conscience, due to the influence of the French revolution, which vividly gave rise to the question of the boundaries of the future country. And every writer, every statesman who studied the question, clearly conceived the boundaries of Italy as marked out by the necessity of closing the doors of Italy against the rapacity of the neighbouring peoples and rulers.

Two thousand years of bitter historical experience could not be passed over in vain by these thoughtful men of ours who, at the dawn of the « Risorgimento », expressed the new conscience of Italy.

For all of them, the Brenner and the chain of mountains which send towards the east the waters of the Sava, and fall on the Quarnero, are the sacred limits which nature has fixed for Italy and beyond which the foreigner is to be driven. And the Brenner and the Nauporto Gap are indicated as the doors which New Italy must essentially guard.

In 1806, in a letter of C. Testi to the minister Marescalchi in Paris, we read of the desire, ardent and diffused, in political and Milanese circles, to have Triest and Fiume and to place the boundary on the ancient line of the Alps (1).

Napoleon himself, in 1813, considered Istria as necessary to the defence of Venice (2); and in his « Memoires », dictated on St. Helena, he refers to the natural boundary of Italy constituted by the line which passes on the mountains between Lubiana and the Isonzo and touches the Adriatic and Fiume.

From 1815, among writers and statesmen, the conception of the real frontier of Italy became determined always more clearly. « The Romans conquered Triest for the political necessity of establishing there a barrier against the transalpine peoples » writes Domenico De Rossetti, solicitor to the commune of Triest in 1815. And in a memorandum presented by the Czar Alexander to the Piedmont Ambassador, the Count of Brusasco, reference is made to the constitution of an Italian state strong enough to close the doors of Italy in the face of the foreigner. Here we read « The limits of this state are traced, by nature, from the slopes of the Moncenisio to the Mountains of Carniola ».

(1) Milan — Napoleonic Archives — Drawer 305.

(2) Sorel — *L'Europe et la révolution française* 1904 Vol. 8-19-174.

And after these manifestations still isolated, there arose a numerous array of historians and political men who guided and determined the public opinion of the « Risorgimento ». There was no hesitation in their minds with regard to the north eastern boundaries of Italy; in all was clear, limpid, the perception **that there could be no sure peace in the new Italian state if the openings to invasion were not well closed**. And this thought formed from then, a lively and constant preoccupation.

Terenzio Mamiani when, in 1848, inciting the Italians to cross the Isonzo also at the cost of much blood, to reach the ancient natural frontiers of Italy, wrote «To the Julian Alps, Soldiers! I would cry out to them», (Political writings, page 264). And elsewhere the same writer says « And it is necessary that the Alps be followed everywhere marking the bounds of Italy as mother nature in the first place created them ».

And *Carour*, in 1851, said that « as long as the Austrians are on this side of the Alps, he could not give up his policy ».

A distinguished group of historians, with *Cesare Balbi* at their head, extended the frontier to the east as far as the Mount Bittorai, basing themselves on a well defined strategic geographic criterion.

The patriot, *Alberto Cavalletto*, in 1862, wished to render popular the idea that the *real Venetia* embraced all the territory included within the Po, Mincio, Adriatic, Raetic, Carnic and Julian Alps, from the Brenner to the Quarnero.

Joseph Mazzini, in 1866, thus spoke « Istria is the key to our eastern frontier, the door of Italy on the Adriatic side: the Trentino is ours as far as the chain of the Raetic Alps ».

Francesco Crispi was anxious, in 1877, on account of Italy's wanting an eastern frontier and did fail to make Bismark note that this deficiency exposed Italy to aggressions from the East.

Aurelio Saffi, Paolo Fambri, Prospero Antonini, S. Bonfiglio, and R. Borghi all examined the question of the Italian frontier with regard to political and military matters: for all of them it was clear that the defence of Italy was to be placed on the external arches of the Julian Alps.

The detailed work by P. Antonini « Eastern Friuli » (Vallardi, Milan 1865) especially shows as being necessary, from a military point of view, besides the rectification which returns to us the defile of Saifnitz (Tarvis), both the basin of Adelsberg and the basins of Ober-Loitsch-Planina and of Zirknitz.

Finally, it is necessary to recall to mind the careful study made by the Sardinian General Staff in 1845, which considers the Trentino and Julian Alps as the only and real *boundary*, the *bulwark* of Italy against the dangers from the East.

IV.

If the question of the boundaries of Italy arose, after the Roman period, in such a vital form only after a great interval of time, and that is, at the beginning of the XIX Century, it is because the Middle Ages, breaking the sovereignty of the state into small feudal and municipal fragments, caused to be lost to view the importance of the political frontier of Italy, considered as a sole and inseparable nation.

And yet, from the fall of Rome to the advent of Napoleon Bonaparte (which coincides with the ripening of a new Italian national conscience) the political problem of the unity of Italy is never forgotten: it is in the minds of writers and statesmen, it takes form in the Roman tradition that Italy must have her boundaries on the Alpine watershed and at the Quarnero.

But, when a great Italian national conscience was formed and the tendency to unite became manifest, the unanimous agreement of writers, historians, political men, military specialists arose and clearly demonstrated **the necessity of placing the frontier of New Italy where nature marked it and that is, on the north, on the Brenner and, on the east, at mount Tricorno, mount Nevoso as far as the Quarnero** confuting, as did Cesare Correnti and Pietro Maestri, in 1864, the absurd German theory that Italy on the east should have no frontier.

And thus — and it is certainly a thesis which does not require further demonstration — it is of no use to illustrate the persistence of Italian sentiments in each of the territories through the particular vicissitudes of history.

Let us remember only — as a proof how deeply the beneficial dominion of Venice was rooted in the regions on the other shore — the demonstrations of grief and affection for the Venetia republic which, even in the Slav districts of Istria, as also in the Dalmatian districts, took place when the « Serenissima » ended with the Pact of Campoformio in 1796, and the continual manifestations of Italian sentiments expressed in every way by the inhabitants of Istria during all the XIX Century.

The ardent appeals of Triest and Fiume in the present days, and the enthusiastic welcome received by our troops, have, on the other hand, consecrated the fact that centuries of struggle and oppression have not succeeded in destroying or bribing the Italian soul of the people of our « irredento » lands, who have arisen happy in their sacred enthusiasm, as soon as the chains which kept them slaves were broken.

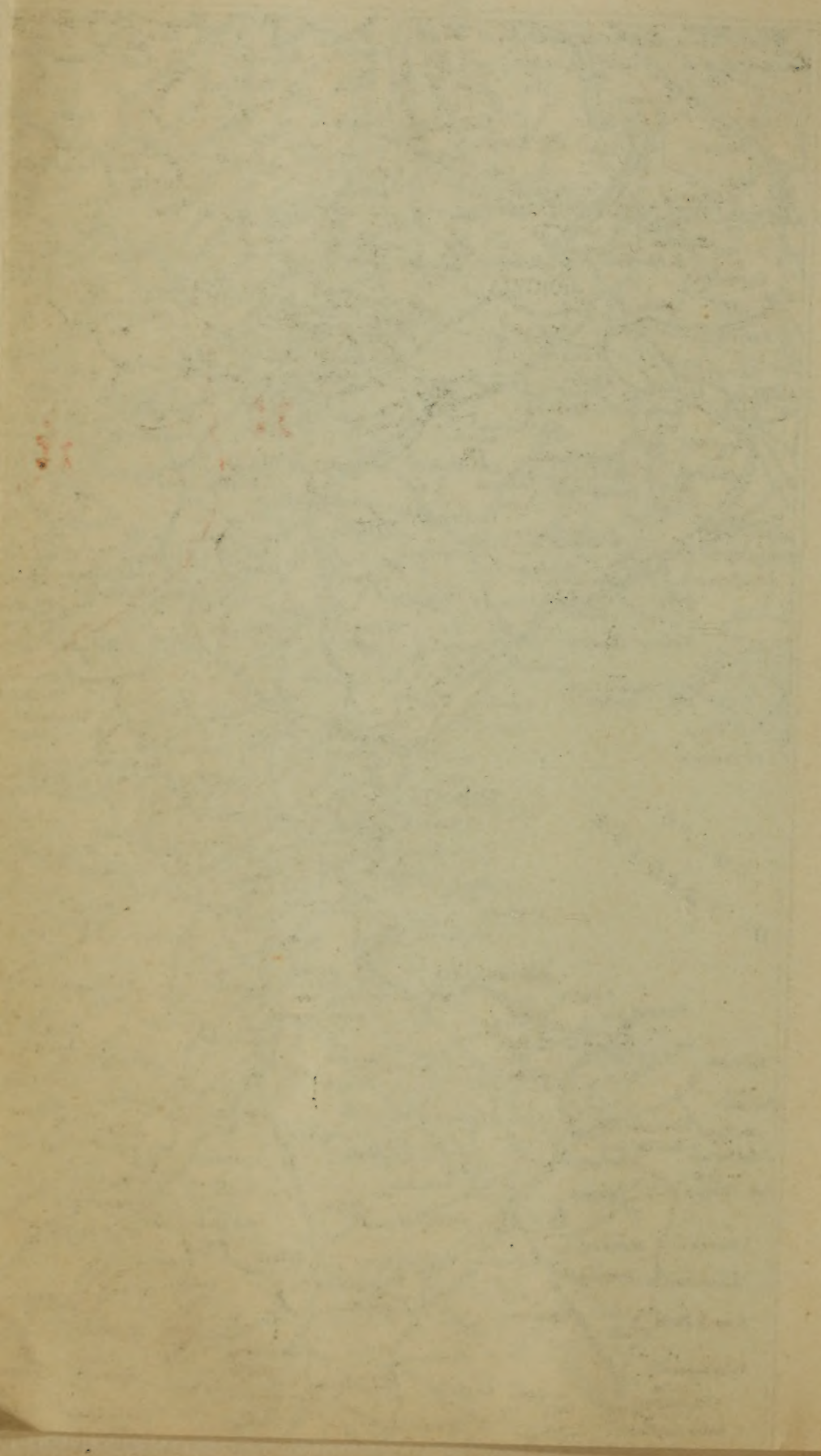
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THE ITALIAN ORIENTAL DEFENSE AS BY THE ROMAN PLAN.



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